

Ecclesiology — Egalitarianism (Junia)

Romans 16:7 NASB

Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

Well, one you assume that it is Junia not Junias, despite church history demonstrating a chasm of interpretation. Origen and Epiphanius believed that the Word was better translated Junias, while others believed Junia was the correct translation. Even if I concede that Junia is the correct rendering, it still doesn't prove she was an apostle:

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Dr. Wallace has written extensively on the matter of (episēmos + dative). ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις is better rendered "are well known to the Apostles". The proper rendering should be in connection with "the" which is the Dative, Masculine, Plural.

"in collocation with words of perception, (en plus) dative personal nouns are often used to show the recipients."
— NET Bible, note to Romans 16:7.

The NET and the ESV have the correct translation. This informs us that Junia was well known to the Apostles, not that she was known among the Apostles, as an Apostle.

Junia Among the Apostles: The Double Identification Problem in Romans 16:7

In Rom 16:7 Paul says, "Greet Andronicus and Junia(s), my compatriots and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to [or prominent among] the apostles, and they were in Christ before me." There are two major interpretive problems in this verse, both of which involve the identification of Junia(s). (a) Is Junia(s) a man's name or a woman's name? (b) What is this individual's relation to the apostles?

Is "Junia(s)" Male or Female?

If 'Ιουνίαν should have the circumflex over the ultima ('Ιουνίαν) then it is a man's name; if it should have the acute accent over the penult ('Ιουνίαν) then it is a woman's name. For help, we need to look in several places. First, we should consider the accents on the Greek manuscripts. This will be of limited value since they were not added until the ninth century to the NT manuscripts. Thus, their ability to reflect earlier opinions is questionable at best. Nevertheless, they are usually decent indicators as to the opinion in the ninth century. And what they reveal is that 'Ιουνίαν was largely considered a man's name (for the bulk of the MSS have the circumflex over the ultima).

Second, somewhat contradictory evidence is found in the church fathers: an almost universal sense that this was a woman's name surfaces—at least through the twelfth century. Nevertheless, this must be couched tentatively because although at least seventeen fathers discuss the issue (see Fitzmyer's commentary on Romans for the data), the majority of these are Latin fathers. The importance of that fact is related to the following point.

Third, another consideration has to do with the frequency of this word as a man's or a woman's name. On the one hand, no instances of Junias as a man's name have surfaced to date in Greek literature, while at least three instances of Junia as a woman's name have appeared in Greek. Further, Junia was a common enough Latin name and, since this was Paul's letter to the Romans, one might expect to see a few Latin names on the list. But even the data on this score can be deceptive, for the man's name Junianas was frequent enough in Latin and Greek writings (and, from my cursory examination of Latin materials, the nickname Junias also occurred as a masculine name on occasion²). What still needs to be examined is the control group: that is, are the other nicknames found in the NT (such as Silas, Epaphras) all exemplified in extra-biblical literature? I don't know the answer to that; to my knowledge no one has done an exhaustive search of the data for all the names of people in the NT (though Lampe has done something fairly close to this, but I have not yet seen his work on "Roman Christians"). In the least, the data on whether 'Ιουνίαν is feminine or masculine are simply inadequate to make a decisive judgment, though what minimal data we do have suggests a feminine name. Although most modern translations

regard the name as masculine, the data simply do not yield themselves in this direction. And although we are dealing with scanty material, it is always safest to base one's views on actual evidence rather than mere opinion.

What is Junia's Relation to the Apostles?

Although the vast bulk of commentaries and translations regard Junia(s) to be one of the apostles (in a non-technical sense), such a view is based on less than adequate evidence. At present, I am involved in a search of the key term in Romans 16:7 that would help us decide this issue—έπισημος. Using the TLGdatabase (which now incorporates all Greek literature from Homer to AD 600 and most Greek literature from AD 600 to 1453), as well as the PHI CD of Greek non-literary papyri, we are able to scan over 100 million words of Greek. Not all of the relevant materials have yet been translated, but of what has a certain pattern has developed.

At issue is whether we should translate the phrase in Romans 16:7—έπισημος ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις—as “outstanding among the apostles” or “well known to the apostles.” Although almost all translations assume the first rendering, this is by no means a given. Even in a meticulous commentary such as Fitzmyer's, though both options are discussed, no evidence is supplied for either. But the evidence is out there; mere opinion is inadequate.

In order to resolve this issue two items need to be examined. First is the lexical field of the adjective έπισημος. Second is the syntactical implication of this adjective in collocation with ἐν plus the dative.

First, for the lexical issue. έπισημος can mean “well known, prominent, outstanding, famous, notable, notorious” (BAGD 298 s.v. έπισημος; LSJ 655-56; LN 28.31). The lexical domain can roughly be broken down into two streams: έπισημος is used either in an implied comparative sense (“prominent, outstanding [among]”) or in an elative sense (“famous, well known [to]”).

Second, the key to determining the meaning of the term in any given passage is both the general context and the specific collocation of this word with its adjuncts. Hence, we turn to the ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις. As a working hypothesis, we would suggest the following. Since a noun in the genitive is typically used with comparative adjectives, we might expect such with an implied comparison. Thus, if in Rom 16:7 Paul meant to say that Andronicus and Junia were outstanding among the apostles, we might have expected him to use the genitive⁴ τῶν ἀποστόλων. On the other hand, if an elative force is suggested—i.e., where no comparison is even hinted at—we might expect ἐν + the dative.

As an aside, some commentators reject such an elative sense in this passage because of the collocation with the preposition ἐν,⁵ but such a view is based on a misperception of the force of the whole construction. On the one hand, there is a legitimate complaint about seeing ἐν with dative as indicating an agent, and to the extent that “well known by the apostles” implies an action on the apostles’ part (viz., that the apostles know) such an objection has merit.⁶ On the other hand, the idea of something being known by someone else does not necessarily imply agency. This is so for two reasons. First, the action implied may actually be the passive reception of some event or person (thus, texts such as 1 Tim 3:16, in which the line ὥφθη ἀγγέλοις can be translated either as “was seen by angels” or “appeared to angels”; either way the “action” performed by angels is by its very nature relatively passive). Such an idea can be easily accommodated in Rom 16:7: “well known to/by the apostles” simply says that the apostles were recipients of information, not that they actively performed “knowing.” Thus, although ἐν plus a personal dative does not indicate agency, in collocation with words of perception, (ἐν plus) dative personal nouns are often used to show the recipients. In this instance, the idea would then be “well known to the apostles.” Second, even if ἐν with the dative plural is used in the sense of “among” (so Moo here, et alii), this does not necessarily locate Andronicus and Junia within the band of apostles; rather, it is just as likely that knowledge of them existed among the apostles.

Turning to the actual data, we notice the following. When a comparative notion is seen, that to which έπισημος is compared is frequently, if not usually, put in the genitive case. For example, in 3 Macc 6:1 we read Ελεαζαρος δέ τις ἀνήρ έπισημος τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς χώρας ἱερέων (“Eleazar, a man prominent among the priests of the country”). Here Eleazar was one of the priests of the country, yet was comparatively outstanding in their midst. The genitive is used for the implied comparison (τῶν ἱερέων). In Ps Sol 17:30 the idea is very clear that the Messiah would “glorify the Lord in a prominent [place] in relation to all the earth” (τὸν κύριον δοξάσει ἐν έπισήμῳ πάσοις τῆς γῆς). The prominent place is a part of the earth, indicated by the genitive modifier. Martyrdom of Polycarp 14:1 speaks of an “outstanding ram from a great flock” (κριός έπισημος ἐκ μεγάλου). Here ἐκ plus the genitive is used instead of the simple genitive, perhaps to suggest the ablative notion over the partitive, since this ram was chosen for sacrifice (and thus would soon be separated from the flock). But again, the salient features are present: (a) an implied comparison (b) of an item within a larger group, (c) followed by (ἐκ plus) the genitive to specify the group to which it belongs.⁷

When, however, an elative notion is found, ἐν plus a personal plural dative is not uncommon. In Ps Sol 2:6, where the Jewish captives are in view, the writer indicates that “they were a spectacle among the gentiles” (έπισήμω ἐν τοῖς

ζθνεσιν). This construction comes as close to Rom 16:7 as any I have yet seen. The parallels include (a) people as the referent of the adjective ἐπίσημος, (b) followed by ἐν plus the dative plural, (c) the dative plural referring to people as well. All the key elements are here. Semantically, what is significant is that (a) the first group is not a part of the second—that is, the Jewish captives were not gentiles; and (b) what was ‘among’ the gentiles was the Jews’ notoriety. This is precisely how we are suggesting Rom 16:7 should be taken. That the parallels discovered so far⁸ conform to our working hypothesis at least gives warrant to seeing Andronicus’ and Junia’s fame as that which was among the apostles. Whether the alternative view has semantic plausibility remains to be seen.

In sum, until further evidence is produced that counters the working hypothesis, we must conclude that Andronicus and Junia were not apostles, but were known to the apostles. To be sure, our conclusion is tentative. But it is always safer to stand on the side of some evidence than on the side of none at all.

This, however, should not be the end of the matter. We welcome any and all evidence that either supports or contradicts our working hypothesis. After all, our objective is to pursue truth.

1 Although some might suspect a chauvinistic motive on the part of the scribes, this assumes that all scribes were men. A recent doctoral dissertation done at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, has demonstrated otherwise.

2 This tentative conclusion is contradicted by older studies that are presently inaccessible to me. Nevertheless, the database I am using is the CD from the Packard Humanities Institute, certainly more comprehensive than anything examined previously.

3 The NET Bible regards this as a woman’s name because the data are sufficient to argue this way, while they are insufficient to argue that it is a man’s name.

4 Either the simple genitive, or one after the preposition ἐκ.

5 Moo, for example, writes: “if Paul had wanted to say that Andronicus and Junia were esteemed ‘by’ the apostles, we would have expected him to use a simple dative or ὑπό with the genitive” (D. J. Moo, Romans, NICNT, 923).

6 Cf. Wallace, Exegetical Syntax, 163–66, where it is indicated that the only clear texts in the NT in which a dative of agency occurs involve a perfect passive verb; in the discussion of ἐν with dative, it is suggested that there are “no unambiguous examples” of this idiom.

7 But in the Additions to Esther 16:22 we read that the people are to “observe this as a notable day among the commemorative festivals” (ἐν ταῖς ... ἔορταῖς ἐπίσημον ήμέραν). In this text, that which is ἐπίσημος is itself among (ἐν) similar entities. Whether this normally or even ever happens with personal nouns in the plural after ἐν is a different matter, and one that cannot be answered until further research is conducted.

8 To be sure, much more work needs to be done. All of TLG and PHI #7 need to be searched for the construction. Nevertheless, the evidence thus far adduced falls right in line with our working hypothesis.

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